OTHER BOOKS BY DONN BYRNE

A DAUGHTER OF THE MEDICI

AN ALLEY OF FLASHING SPEARS

THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

BLIND RAFTERY

BROTHER SAUL

FIELD OF HONOR

HANGMAN'S HOUSE

O'MALLEY OF SHANGANAGH

A PARTY OF BACCARAT

RIVERS OF DAMASCUS

STORIES WITHOUT WOMEN

THE WIND BLOWETH

A WOMAN OF THE SHEE

MESSER MARCO POLO

BY

DONN BYRNE



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MESSER MARCO POLO

THE MESSAGE CAME TO ME AT THE SECOND check of the hunt that a countryman and a clansman needed me The ground was heavy the day raw and it was a drag too fast for fun and too tame for sport So I blessed the countryman and the clansman and turned my back on the field

But when they told me his name I all but fell from the saddle

But that man s dead!

But he wasn t dead He was in New York He was traveling from the crags of Ulster to his grandson who had an orange grove on the Indian River in Florida He wasn t dead And I said to myself with impatience Must every man born ninety years ago be dead?

But this is a damned thing I thought to be saddled with a man over ninety years old To have to act as *garde malade* at my age! Why couldn t he have stayed and died at home? Sure one of these days he will die as we all die and the ghost of him will never be content on the sluggish river by the mossy trees where the blue herons and the white

cranes and the great gray pelicans fly It will be going back I know to the booming surf and the red berried rowan trees and the barking eagles of Antrim To die out of Ulster when one can die in Ulster there is a gey foolish thing

But the harsh logic of Ulster left me and the soft mood of Ulster came on me as I remembered him and I going into the town on the train And the late winter grass of Westchester spare scrofulous the jerry built bungalows the lines of uncomely linen blatant advertising boards—all the ugliness of it passed away and I was again in the Antrim glens There was the soft purple of the Irish Channel and there the soft dim outline of Scotland There was the herring school silver in the sun and I could see it from *the crags where the surf boomed like a drum* And underfoot was the heather the heather the belled and purple heather

And there came to me again the vision of the old man's thatched farmhouse when the moon was up and the bats were out and the winds of the County Antrim came bellowing down the glens The turf fire lay on the hearth now red now yellow and there was the golden light of lamps and Malachi

of the I ong Clen wis reciting some poem of Blind Kaftery s or the lament of Pierre Ron sard for Mary Queen of Scots

Ta ribin o mo cheadsl earc ann mo pl oca sios
Agas mna Eirip ni leigl e usfidaois rio bhron
fara ir
Ta me seidh leat go ndeantar damh comhra caol'
Agis gol hfasfai th an fe ir no thuai th sin thrid mo
lar ani s

There is a ribl on from my only love in my pocket
deep
And the women of Europe they could not cure my
grief alis!
I am doi e with you until a narrow coffin be made
for me
And until the griss shall grow after that up through
my h art!

And I suddenly discovered on the rum bling train that apart from the hurling and the foot ball and the jumping of horses what life I remembered of Ulster was bound up in Malachi Campbell of the Long Clen

A very strange old man hardy as a black thorn immense bowed shoulders the face of some old hawk of the mountains hair white and plentiful as some old cardinal s All his kinsfolk were dead except for one grand daughter And he had become a tradi

tion in the glens It was said he had been an ecclesiastical student abroad in Valladolid and that he had forsaken that life And in France he had been a tutor in the family of MacMahon roi d *Irlande* and somewhere he had married and his wife had died and left him money and he had come back to Antrim He had been in the Papal Zouaves and fought also in the American Civil War A strange figure who knew Greek and Latin as well most professors and who had never forg his Gaelic

Antrim will ever color my own writing My Fifth Avenue will have something in of the heather glen My people will hav always a phrase a thought a flash of Scot Irish mysticism and for that I must thank or blame Malachi Campbell of Long Glen The stories I heard and I young were not of Little Rollo and Sir W Scott s but the horrible tale of the Naked Hangman who goes through the Valleys on Midsummer s Eve of Dermot and Granye o the Bright Breasts of the Cattle Raid Maeve Queen of Connacht of the old of Cuchulain in the Island of Skye grisly homely stories such as you of the

foot ballers of Cushendun whose ball is a skull and whose goal is the portals of a ruined graveyard strange religious poems like the Dialogue of Death and the Sinner

Do thu ainn Lastin do gach deoraidh treith lag—
I used to give lodging to every poor wanderer
Food and drink to him I would see in want
His proper payment to the man requesting reckoning
Och! Is not Jesus hard if he condemns me!

All these stories of all these people he told had the unreal shimmering quality of that mirage that is seen from Portrush cliffs a glittering city in a golden desert surrounded by a strange sea mist All these songs all these words he spoke were native had the same tang as the turf smoke the Gaelic quality that is in dark lakes on mountains summits in plovers nests amid the heather And to remember them now in New York to see him

Fifteen years had changed him but little a little more tremor and slowness in the walk a bow to the great shoulders an eye that flashed like a knife

And what do you think of New Yor Malachi

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And what do you think of New York Malachi

I w is here befoie your honor will remem ber I fought it the Wilderness

I forbore asking him what change he had found I saw his quivering nostrils

In a few days he would proceed south when he had orientated himself after the days of shipboard

That night it seemed every one chose to come in and cluster around the fire Randall the poet and the two blond Danish girls with their hair like flax Fraser the golfer just over from Prestwick and a young writer with his spurs yet to win and this one and that one

They all kept silence as old Malachi spoke sportsmen artists men and women of the world a hush came on them and their eyes showed they were not before the crackling fire in the long room but amazed in the Antrim glens

Yes old Malachi said things were changed over there and a greater change was liabl

- People whispered that in the Valley of the Black Pig the Boar without Bristles ha been seen at the close of the day and Templemore there was a bleeding and these were ominous portents So folks believed and some didn t A

the great Irish hunter that had won the Grand National the greatest horse in the world

But our Man of War Malachi? Oh sure all he could do was run and a hare or a greyhound could beat him at that but Shawn Spadah a great jumper him as well as a runner in fine a horse And did I know that Red Simon McEwer of Cushundall had gone around Portrush in eighteen consecutive fours? A Rathlin Islander had tried to swim across to Scotland but didn t make it and there was great arguing as to whether it was because of the currents or of lack of strength There were rumblings in the Giants Causeway very strange A woman in Oran had the second sight the most powerful gift of second sight in generations There was a new piper in Islay and it was said he was a second McCrimmon And a new poet had arisen in Uist and all over the Highlands they were reciting his songs and his Lament for the Bruce Was I still as keen for did I still remember the poems and the great stories?

Behold the night is of great length I quoted Unbearable Tell us therefore of *those wondrous deeds*

I was here before your honor will remember I fought at the Wilderness

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Did you ever see a scholar standing in front of a slip of a girl? In all his learning he can find nothing to say to her. And every penny poet in the country knows.

Let you be listening now, Brian Oge, and let all the scholars be listening. But whether the scholars do or not I'm not caring. A pope once listened to me with great respect, and a marshal of France and poets without number. But the scholars do be turning up their [illegible]. And mind you, I've got as much scho[illegible] as the next man, as you'll see from [illegible].

Barring myself, is there no [illegible] house that takes snuff? No! Ah, [illegible] do be changing.

I

Now it's nearing night on the first day of spring and you could see how loath day was to be going for even the short time until the rising of the sun again And though there was a chill on the canals yet there was great color to the sunset the red of it on the water ebbing into orange and then to purple and losing itself in the olive pools near the mooring ties And a little wind came up from the Greek islands and now surged and fluttered the way you'd think a harper might be playing You'd hear no sound but the melody was there It was the rhythm of spring that the old people recognize

But the young people would know it was spring too by token of the gaiety that was in the air For nothing brings joy to the heart like the coming of spring The folk who do be blind all the rest of the year their eyes do open then and a sunset takes them and the wee virgin flowers coming up between the stones or the twitter of a bird upon the bough And young women do be preening themselves and young men do be singing

even they that have the voices of rooks There is something stirring in them that is stirring in the ground with the bursting of the seeds

And young Marco Polo threw down the quill in the counting house where he was learning his trade The night was coming on He was only a strip of a lad and to lads the night is not rest from work and the quietness of sleeping but gaming and drinking and courting young women Now there were two women he might have gone to and one was a great Venetian lady with hair the red of a queen s cloak and a great noble shape to her and great dignity But with her he would only be reciting verses or making grand stilted compliments the like of those you would hear in a play And while that seemed to fit in with winter and candlelight it was poor sport for spring The other one was a black plump little gown maker a pleasant singing little woman very affectionate and very proud to have one of the great Polos loving her She was eager for kissing and always asking the lad to be careful of himself to be putting his cloak on or to be sure and drink something warm when he got home that night for the air from the canals was

chill The great lady was too much of the mind and the little gown maker was too much of the body either of them to be pleasing young Marco on the first night of spring

Now it is a queer thing will be pleasing a young man on the first night of spring The wandering foot itches and the mind and body are keen to follow There is that inside a young man that makes the hunting dog rise from the hearth on a moonlight night Be gor' it s myself ll take a turn through the fields on the chance of a bit of coursing A weasel maybe or an otter would l out the night Or a hare itself Ay there would be sport for you! The hare running hell for leather and me after him over brake and dell Ay! Ay! Ay! a good hunt s a jewel' I ll take a stretch along the road

Or there is in him what does be troubling the birds and they on tropic islands Tweet tweet they grumble A grand place this surely and very comfortable for the winter The palm trees are green but I d rather have the green of young grass And the sea you ken it becomes monotonous Do you remember the peaches of Champagne wife and the cherry trees of Antrim? Do you remembe

the farmer who was such a bad shot and his wife with the red petticoat! I'm feeling fine and strong in the wings *avourneen* What do you say? Let's bundle and go!

He wandered out with the discontent of the season on him The sun had dropped at last and everywhere you'd see torches and the image of torches in the water On the canals of the town great barges moved Everywhere were fine noble shadows and the splashing of oars There was a great admiral's galley ready to put to sea against Genoa There a big merchantman back from Africa And along the canals went all the people in the world you'd think Now it was a Frenchman all silks and satins and *la-di da mon sieur!* Or a Spaniard with a pointed beard and long lean legs and a long lean sword And now it was a Greek courtesan white as milk sitting in her gondola as on a throne Here was a Muscovite hairy dirty with fine fur and fine jewels and teeth sharp as a dog's And now an effeminate Greek nobleman languid as a bride And here were Moorish captains *Othello's* men great giants of black marble and swarthy hook nosed merchants of Palestine and the squires of Crusaders—pretty ringleted boys swearing like demons

And here and there were Scots and Irish mercenaries kilted sensitive folk one moment smiling at you and the next a knife in your gizzard

And as he went through the courts there were whispers and laughter and occasionally a soft voice invited him to enter but he smiled and shook his head

Near the Canal de Mestre which is close by the Ghetto he stopped by the wine shop called The Prince of Bulgaria and he could hear great disputation And some were speaking of Baldwin II and how he had no gut to have let Palæologus take Constantin from him And others were murmuring at Genoa Mark us they mean trouble the dogs Better wipe them off the face of th earth now And a group were discussing th chances of raiding the Jewish Kingdom of t Yemen They ve got temples there roo with gold And an Irish piper playing on a little silver set of pipes and Indian magician was doing great sleight hand

I ll go in and talk to the strange fo people said Marco Polo

II

Now you might be thinking that the picture I'm drawing is out of my own head. Let you not be thinking of it as it is now, a city of shadows and ghosts with a few scant visitors mooning in the canals. The Pride of the West she was, the Jewel of the East. Constantinople was her courtyard. Greece, Egypt, Abyssinia, Bulgaria and Muscovy her ten-acre fields. The Crusaders on their way to fight the Saracen stopped to plead for her help and generosity. There were no soldiers more chivalrous, not even the French. There were no better fighters, not even the Highland clans. Sailors! You'd think those fellows had invented the sea. And as for riches and treasures, oh! the wonder of the world she was! Tribute she had from everywhere: the four great horses of Saint Mark, they came from Constantinople. The two great marble columns facing the Piazzetta, sure they came from Acre. When foreign powers wanted the loan of money, it was to Venice they came. Consider the probity of Venetian men. They once held as pledge the Crown of Thorns

itself King Louis IX of France redeemed it

The processions of the tradespeople were like a king s retinue and they marching in state on the election of a doge Each in their separate order they d come the master smiths first as is right every one garlanded like a *conqueror with their banner and their* buglers The furriers next in ermine and taffeta the tanners with silver cups filled with wine the tailors in white with ver million stars the wool workers with olive branches the quilt makers in cloaks trimmed with fleur de lis the cloth of gold weavers with golden crowns set with pearls the shoe makers in fine silk while the silk workers were in fustian the cheese dealers and pork butchers in scarlet and purple the fish mongers and poulterers armed like men of war the glass makers with elegant specime of their art the comb makers with little bird in cages the barber surgeons on horsebac very dignified very learned and with t you d think there d be an end to them b cast your eye back on that procession you d find guilds as far as your sight w reach

Let you be going down the markets what would you see for sale? Boots clotl

bread No they were out of sight but scattered on the booths the like of farls of bread on a fair day you'd find cloves and nutmegs mace and ebony from Moluccas that had come by way of Alexandria and the Syrian ports sandalwood from Timor in Asia camphor from Borneo Sumatra and Java sent benzoin to her markets Cochin China sent bitter aloe wood From China and Japan and from Siam came gum spices silks chessmen and curiosities for the parlor Rubies from Peru fine cloths from Coromandel and finer still from Bengal They got spikenard from Nepaul and Bhutan Their diamonds were from Golconda From Nirmul they purchased Damascus steel for their swords Nor is that all you'd see and you'd be going down by the markets on a sunny morning and a fine thinking low-voiced woman on your arm You'd see pearls and sapphires topaz and cinnamon from Ceylon lac and agates brocades and coral from Cambay hammered vessels and inlaid weapons and embroidered shawls from Cashmere As for spices never would your nostrils meet such an odor bdellium from Scinde musk from Tibet galbanum from Khorasan from Afghanistan asafetida from Persia sagapenum ambergris and civet from

Zanzibar and from Zanzibar came ivory too And from Zeila Berbera and Shehri came balsam and frankincense

And that was Venice and Marco Polo a young man And now it s only a town like any other town but for its churches and canals There s many a town has ghosts but none the ghosts that Venice has not Rome itself or Tara of the kings

Once did she hold Randall quoted the gorgeous East in fee
And was the safeguard of the West the worth
Of Venice did not fall below her birth
Venice the eldest Child of Liberty
She was a maiden city bright and free
No guile seduced no force could violate
And when she took unto herself a mate
She must espouse the everlasting Sea!

Time is the greatest rogue of all Not all the arrows of Attila can do the damage of a trickle of sand in an hour glass! Tyre and Sidon Carthage ancient Babylon and Venice queen of them all

I am describing Venice to you for this reason You might now stand where Troy s wall once were and say to yourself Was where Helen walked with her little son? Wa this where the loveliest face of ages wept?

And a chill of doubt would come on you and you would think I ve been wasting my sorrow and wasting my love for it was all nothing but an old tale made up in a minstrel s head

And sometime in Venice after your dinner in a hotel you d go out for a while in a *barca* that would have no more romance to it nor the bark a gillie would row and you sahn on fishing on a cold blustery day and you would feel disappointed you having come so far and you d say It was a grand story surely and bravely did it pass the winter evening but wasn t old Malachi of the Long Glen the liar of the world!

I wouldn t have you saying that and I dead In all I m telling you I d have you to know there s not a ha porth of lie

III

And so Marco Polo went into the wine shop to see and hear the strange foreign people

It was a dark long room very high full of shadows between the flaming torches on the wall At one side of it was a great fire burning for all it was the first night of spring At one end of it were the great barrels of liquor for the thirsty customers black beer for the English and the Irish grand hairy stuff with great foam to it and brown beer for the Germans and there was white wine there for the French people and red wine for the Italians asque baugh for the Scots and rum from the s gar cane for such as had cold in their bones Ther was all kind of drink there in the brass b barrels--drink would make you mad a drink would make you merry drink woul put heart in a timid man and drink woul make fighting men peaceful as pigeons drink that would make you forget trouble-- in the brass bound barrels at the end of room And pleasant fat little men were ro ing around serving the varied liquor in

silver cups and fine Venetian glasses for the wine and in broad bellied drinking pots that would hold more than a quart

And there was such a babel of language as was never heard but in one place before

Some of the drinkers were dicing and shouting as they won and grumbling and cursing when they lost And some were singing And some were dancing to the Irish pipes And there was a knot around the Indian conjurer

But there was one man by himself at a table And him being so silent you d think he was shouting for attention He was so restful against the great commotion you d know he was a great man You might turn your back on him and you d know he was there though he never even whispered nor put out a finger A fat pleasant close coupled man he was in loose green clothes with gold brocade on them And there were two big gold ear rings in his lobes He smoked a wee pipe with the bowl half ways up it The pipe was silver and all stem and the bowl no bigger than a ten cent piece His shoulders were very powerful so you d know he was a man you should be polite to and out of that chest of his a great shout could come He might have been a workingman only when he fingered his pipe

Everybody in the room was white and shaken—all but the sea captain. He just tamps his pipe as if nothing had happened and smokes on. He doesn't even take a drink from his glass.

And a little while later an Irish chieftain walks in. He's poor and ragged and very thin. You might know he'd been fighting the heathen for the Holy Sepulchre, and so entitled to respect no matter what his condition. And behind him are five clansmen as ragged as he. But a big German trooper rolls up.

And what are you? says the big burly fellow.

A gentleman, I hope, says the ragged chief.

'Tis yourself that says it, laughs the German trooper. The chieftain snicks the knife from his armpit and sticks him in the jugular as neat as be damned.

You ... of ... take that out, Kevin Beg— the Ir... points to the killed man—and throw ... meone might stumble o... is

N... conceive roused t... room. They were ... mariners and ... ng and a...

guing the rights and wrongs of the matter All but the sea captain who saw it all and he never blinked an eyelid never even missed a draw of the pipe

And then Marco Polo knew him to be a Chinaman because as all the world knows Chinamen are never surprised at anything

IV

SO MARCO I OLO GOES OVER AND SALUTES HIM politely

I wonder if you mind my sitting down by you for a while he says I perceive you re from China

The sea captain waves him politely to his place

I m from China He smiles You guessed right

Is it long since you ve been in China?

Well that depends upon what you call long says the captain If you mean time it s one thing If you mean voyage it s another For you ve got to take into account says he adverse winds roundabout turns to avoid currents possible delays to have the ship scraped free from the parasite life that does be attaching itself to the strakes time spent in barter and trade Other matters too the attacks of pirates cross grained princes who don t want you to be leaving their ports with a good cargo in your hold sickness loss of sails and masts repairs to the ship It wasn t a short journey and it wasn t a long one

It will be a long ways to China I m thinking

I can tell you how long it is from China to here and you can reverse that and you will get a fair idea of how long it is from here to China I left Zeitoon with a cargo of porcelain for Japan and traded it for gold dust and from Japan I went to Chamba to lay in a store of chessmen and pen cases And from Chamba I sailed to Java which is the greatest island in the world Java is fifteen hundred miles from Chamba south and southeast and it took me four months sailing but a sea captain cannot pass Java by for it is the chief place for black pepper nutmegs spikenard galingale cubebs cloves and all the spices that grow

And I stopped at various small islands from there until I came to Basma which is the island of the unicorns And there we trade in pygmies which ignorant people think are human folk They are just a wee monkey with all the hair plucked out except the hair of the beard There is great money in them

I stopped at Sumatra for coconuts and toddy and just for water at Dragoian Dragoian is not a good city It is filled with sorcerers who have tattooed faces At Lambri I put in

for the sago you buy from the hairy men with tails

Son never stop at the isle of Andaman The men there have faces like dogs They are a cruel generation and eat every one they can catch I could tell you a story but I would not spoil this fine spring night Go rather to the island of Ceylon and see the King's Ruby which is the greatest jewel in the world I stopped there and at Coromandel for the pearls the divers go down in the sea for and there are no clothes on that island so that every one goes naked as a fish And there is the shrine of Saint Thomas I was there

Gujarat Tana I stopped there The Male and Female Islands I put into for ambergris Socotra which is full of magicians—I was there too Madagascar and Zanzibar where they live on camel flesh I was there And from Zanzibar I came north to Abyssinia because I had to get an ostrich there for the King of Siam And there was a letter and a parcel fo the Sultan of Egypt So I went to Cairo I ha a month on my hands so I thought I d over and see Venice because it s a hobby o mine you might say to see the world

Now let me reckon Four and three m seven and four more are eleven and six

seventeen and let us say nine with that and you have twenty six And the month I m for getting on the rocks of Aden is twenty seven and a week here and a week there for bad winds and such like It would be safe to put that at three months So it s two years and a half since I left China

You never says young Marco met any body in China by the name of Polo

Poh lo Poh lo China s a bigger place nor you would imagine laddie There s half a hundred million people there

These were foreigners Marco explained traders They were at the court of the Great Khan

Polo Polo? Well now I think I ve heard of them Was one of them a big red bearded man with a great eye for a horse and a great eye for a woman?

That would be my Uncle Matthew

For God s sake! And was the other a cold dark man a good judge of jewel and a grand judge of a sword?

My father Nicholas Polo

For God s sake! you re the son of one and the nephew of the other!

Did you know them?

Ah laddie how would I be knowing peo-

for the sago you buy from the hairy men with tails

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Now let me reckon Four and three makes seven and four more are eleven and six are

A cold and beautiful princess says Marco Polo

She is not a cold and beautiful princess says the sea captain She is warm as the sun in early June and she may be beautiful and a princess but we all think of her as Golden Bells the little girl in the Chinese garden

Did you ever see her? says Marco eagerly *Tell me*

I saw her before I left says the sea captain I was at the Khan s palace of Chagan nor says he seeing of the chief of the stewards was there anything I could get for him and I in foreign parts And as I was being rowed back along the river by my ten brawny sailormen what did I pass but the garden of Golden Bells

And there she was by the river side a little brown slip of a girl in green coat and trousers with a flower in her dark hair

And I lower my head in reverence as we pass by But I hear her low merry voice by reason of which they call her Golden Bells

Ho master of the vessel! she calls Where do you go?

And the sailors back water with a swish and I stand up respectfully for all she is only a slip of a girl

I go to foreign parts Golden Bells I tell her to far and dangerous places into the Indian Ocean To the Island of Unicorns and to the land where men eat men

I hope you come back safe master of the vessel she says I hope you have a good voy age and come back safe It must be a dreadful strain on your people to think of you so far away

In all this wide land I tell her there is none to worry about me I have neither chick nor child

Golden Bells will worry about you then she said and you in the hazards of the sea And take this flower for luck And she gave me the flower from her hair And let it bring you luck against the anger of the ocean and the enemies all men have And let me know when you are back because I ll be wor ried about a man of China and him in danger on the open sea

And wasn t that a wonderful thing from a daughter of Kubla to me a poor sailor man?

The son of the King of Siam came to woo her with a hundred princes on a hundred ele phants but she wouldn t have him I don t wish to be a queen she told her father How could I be a queen? I am only Golden Bells

Nor would she have anything to say to the Prince of the Land of Darkness who came to her with sea ivory and pale Arctic gold The sun of China is in my heart and you wouldn t have me go up into the great coldness to shiver and die?

So she remains in her garden by the lake of Cranes with Li Po the great poet him they call the Drinker of Wine to make songs for her and the *Sanang* Tung Chih the great magician to perform wonders for her when she is wearied and Bulagan her nurse to take her to her heart when she is sad

And sad she is a lot of the time they tell me She sits in her garden in the dusk playing her lute and singing the Song of the Willow Branches which is the saddest love song in the world

And why she should be singing a sad love song is a mystery for her soft brown beauty is the flower of the world For there would be no lack of suitors for her nor is she the one to refuse love The only thing I make of it is that the right hour hasn t come

The beauty of Venice jumps to your eyes but the beauty of this pulls at your heart Little brown Golden Bells in her Chinese garden singing the song of the Willow

Branches at the close of day Is that not better nor Venice?

But he got no word out of Marco Polo sitting with his chin cupped in his hands And that was the finest answer at all at all

V

THE TIMES WENT BY AND MARCO POLO BUSIED himself with his daily affairs keeping track of the galleasses with merchandise to strange far away ports buying presents for refractory governors who didn t care for foreign trade in their domains getting wisdom from the old clerks and knowledge from the mariners in the main acting as the son of a great house while the heads of it were away

You would think that he would have forgotten what the sea captain of China told him about Golden Bells what with work and sport and other women near him You would think that would drop out of his memory like an old rime But it stuck there as an old rime sometimes sticks and by dint of thinking he had her fast now in his mind—so fast so clear so full of life that she might be some one he had seen an hour ago or was going to see an hour from now He would think of the now merry now sad eyes of her and the soft sweet voice of her by reason of which they called her Golden Bells and the dusky little face and the hair like black silk and the splotch of the

red flower in it She was as distinct to him as the five fingers on his hand It wasn t only she was clear in his mind s eye but she was inside of him closer than his heart She was there when the sun rose so he would be saying It s a grand day is in it surely Golden Bells She was there in the dim counting house and he going over in the great intricate ledgers the clerks do be posting carefully with quills of the gray goose so that he would be saying I wonder where this is and that is Sure I had my finger on it only a moment ago Golden Bells And when the dusk was falling and the bats came out and the quiet of Christ was over everything and the swallows flew low on the great canals she would be beside him and never a word would he say to her so near to him would she be

And she wrought strangeness between him and the women he knew the great grave lady with the large pale mouth her that was of his mind and the little black cloak maker with the eager red mouth her that was closer than mind or heart to him So that the first found fault with his poetry

I don t know what s come over you Marco Polo —and there was a touch of temper in

her voice — but these poems of yours show me you haven't your mind on your subject Would you mind telling me when I had bound black hair? she says And you say my bosom is like two little russet apples Now a regular poet once compared it to two great silver cups and that was a good comparison though in truth she says he knew as little about it as you And my hands are not like soft Eastern flowers They're like lilies I don't know where you do be getting these Eastern comparisons she says But I don't like them Tell me pretty boy —she looks suspicious — you haven't been taking any of the strange Egyptian drugs the dark people do be selling in the dim shops on the quiet canals? Look out pretty boy! Look out!

And the little cloak maker grumbled when he was gone I don't know what's wrong with him says she Or maybe it's something that's wrong with myself but this delicate love isn't all it's cracked up to be It's all right in books she says and it's a grand sight and the players doing it but I like a hug she says would put the breath out of you and a kiss she says you could feel in the soles of your feet And she lay awake and grum

bled Let him be taking his la di da courting to those as favor it says she It s not my kind and she grumbled through the lonely night I wonder where my husband is now she said And wasn t I the foolish girl to be sending him off! Sure he drank like a fish and beat me something cruel but he was a rare lover and the mood on him Sure a woman never knows when she s well off says she

And Marco Polo didn t miss them any more nor you d miss an old overcoat and the winter past All his mind was on was the Golden Bells of China And he thought long until his uncle and father came so that he could be off with them to the strange Chinese land

But there s no use to me going there says he I couldn t marry her She would laugh at me he says She who refused the son of the King of Siam with his hundred princes on a hundred elephants what use would she have for me who s no better nor a peddler with his pack? But it would be worth walking the world barefoot for to see that little golden face to hear the low sweet voice they call Golden Bells

They came back in due time his uncle Matthew the red hairy man and his father

the thin dark man who knew precious stones And he told them he wanted to go with them when they made their next expedition to China

We could be using you after your training in trade says the father But Marco Polo would take no interest in barter Sure you d better come along says his uncle Matthew There s great sport to be had on the road kissing and courting the foreign women and not a word of language between you barring a smile and a laugh

I have no interest in the foreign women Uncle Matthew

Then it s the horses you ve been hearing about the fine Arab horses faster nor the wind and the little Persian ponies they do be playing polo on and the grand Tatar hunters that can jump the height of a man and they sure footed as a goat Ah the horses the bonny horses!

Ah sure Uncle Matthew t is little I know of horses Sure I know all about boats racing and trade and war boats but a horse is not kin to me

Then what the hell s the use of your going to China?

Ah sure that s the question I m asking myself Uncle Matthew But I have to go I do so There is something calling me Uncle Matthew—a bell in my ear father s brother and there s a ringing bell in my heart

VI

I SHALL NOW TELL YOU HOW IT CAME ABOUT that Marco Polo went to China with his uncle and father though he had no eye for a bargain or interest in courting foreign women or sense of horses

Now as you may know this was a great religious time The Crusaders feeling shame that the Sepulchre of the Lord Jesus should be in Saracen hands had come with horse foot and artillery to Palestine to give tribute of arms to Him who had died for them on the Bitter Tree And great feats were performed and grand battles won And kings became saints like Louis of France and saints became kings like Baldwin of Constantinople Mighty wonders were seen and miracles performed so that people said Now will be the second coming of Christ and the end of the world

And a great desire came on the Christian people to tell the truth of Christ to the strange and foreign peoples of the world So that every day out of Jerusalem you would see friars hitting the road some of them to confront the

wizards of the Land of Darkness and some to argue theology with the old lamas of Tibet and some to convert the sunny Southern islands where the young women do be letting down their hair and the men do be forgetting God for them And all over the world there was spreading a great rumor that the truth of all things was at last known

Even Kubla Khan had heard of it far off in China and he had charged the uncle and father of Marco with a message to the Pope of Rome Let the pope be sending some theologians to his court and they d argue the matter out and if he was satisfied that this new religion was the True Religion then he d turn Christian and tell his people to turn Christian too And let them be bringing back some of the Oil of the Lamp which burns in the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem and is a cure for all the ills in the world

And when they came to the City of Acre sure the pope was dead And they waited a long time but no new pope was chosen so they decided to go back because they had a good business there and they didn t want lose it And yet they knew there d be tro with the Grand Khan if they didn t br

back the news of the True Religion and people to argue it

I ve been a long time trading says Nicolo and it s a queer thing but the more trading you do the less religion you have The arguing of religion would not come easy to me And I d be up against experts I m not the man for it says he How about you Matthew?

Oh sure they d never listen to me Matthew laughs— me that s drank with them and deludhered their women and gambled until I left them nothing but the sweat of their brows I d be a great one to preach religion to them Why man they d laugh at me But I tell you what Nicolas There s a bishop in Negropont and I know where he lives and I know his house and everything What do you say Nicolas? We ll just throw a bag over his head and tie him on a horse Oh sure he d give grand discourses to the Great Khan!

Have sense Matthew have sense You re always too rough always ready to end an argument with a knife or just lift what you want Have sense man you can t kidnap a bishop like you d kidnap a woman

Well I don t see why not says Matthew It would be easier too because a woman will

scratch like a wildcat But if you re set against it I won t do it he says Well then how about young Marco?

My sound man Matthew! my bully fel low! Sure you were never at a loss yet! Young Marco it is sure t is the elegant idea There not a man born of woman better for the job

Now all the Christian world had gone rel gious and young Marco was no exception I t is not only the old that are religious T young are too but there s a difference T religion of old men is reason and translation the religion of the young is just a burni cloud The tragedy of the Bitter Tree is nc a symbol to them but a reality and their tea are not of the spirit but of the body too

And there are no half way houses no cc promises in a young man s creed It s swallo all or be damned to you It s believe or be

And thinking over the little girl in the Cl nese garden there had come into Marco heart a thought past enduring If litt Golden Bells did not believe then I Golden Bells was lost She might have eve thing in this world in this life an empe for a father kings for suitors a great poet f a minstrel a wizard for an entertainer b once the little blue shadow left her body sl

was lost forever And the sight came to him of little Golden Bells going down the dim and lonely alleys of death and weeping weeping weeping Her eyes would be shot with panic and the little mouth twisted and the little flowery hands twitching at each other And it would be cold there for her who was so warm and it would be dark there for her who loved light and the Golden Bells of her *voice would be lost in the whistling and clanging of the stars as they swung by in their orbits* He to be in the great delight of paradise and she to be in the blue grey maze between the worlds—what tragedy!

Kings might bring her presents a husband might bring her happiness but if he could only bring her salvation! If he could only tell her of the Bitter Tree!

The body when you came to think of it mattered little All the beauty in the world could not endure more than its appointed span Helen was dust now and Deirdre nothing What had become of the beauty of Semiramis Alexander's darling and Cleopatra who loved the great proconsul and Bathsheba for whom David of the Psalms fell from grace? And Balkis queen of Sheba with her apes ivory and peacocks Dust and ashes

dust and ashes! And Scheherazade was but a strange sad sound Beauty increased and waned like the moon A little shadow around the eyes a little crinkle in the neck the backs of the hands stiffening like parchment Dust and ashes dust and ashes!

But the little blue shadow would glow like an Easter morning

Or it would be a poor lonely unlit shadow in the cold gloom of the changing worlds

Poor Golden Bells! Poor little weeping Golden Bells! If he could only tell her about the Bitter Tree!

And then what happens but his uncle Mat thew claps him on the back

How would you like to go to China Marco Markeen says he and preach religion to the benighted people!

How did you know Uncle Matthew?

How did I know what?

That I wanted to go to China and preach religion to the—the people!

Well if that doesn t beat Banagher sa Matthew Polo and Banagher beats the devi Tell me did you ever hear an old tune call Bundle and Go! ?

And so the three of them leave upon t

journey but at Layas where the King of Armenia had his castle they heard of the election of a new pope so they came back to Acre to get his instructions and blessing

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VII

THE POPE SAID A GRAND MASS FOR THEM AND at the gospel he enters the pulpit a burly figure of a man with sad eyes

The blessing of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost be with you and about you Amen

It is not to you Nicolo Polo that I wish to speak nor to you Matthew Polo for neither of you are my ambassadors to the Great Khan Merchant and sportsman I honor you and you have my blessing but you have no hopes of mine The dirty diversions of the world are between your eyes and glory said he It s only myself an old and sorrowful man and this child a young and hopeful one can understand old men having sight of visions and young men dreaming dreams

Now in the matter of converting the Great Khan and his numerous millions first let wisdom speak I have little hopes He wants to be argued into it you see Religion is not a matter of argument It is a wisdom that surpasses wisdom It drifts in men s souls as the foggy dew comes unbidden to the trees It is born

before our soul as the horned moon is born before our eyes

And now my child you might say What is the use of sending me to China if he knows I cannot bring these millions into the fold? My dear son there is the wisdom surpassing wisdom A great and noble thought must not die Things of the spirit we cannot reckon as a husbandman reckons his crops There is a folk on the marches of Europe and they are ever going into battle and they always fall Their results are nothing But their name and their glory will endure forever

My dear son God has put wisdom in my head and beauty into yours Wisdom is needed for the governance of this world but beauty is needed for its existence In arid deserts there is no life Birds do not sing in the dark of night Show me a waste country and I ll show you a brutal people No faith can live that is not beautiful

The beauty God has put in your heart child you must always keep How much I think of it I ll tell you I m an old man now an old and broken man and in a few years I ll stand before my Master

What have you seen on my earth He ll ask me you who followed St Peter!

Lord! Lord! I'll tell him I've seen mighty things I've seen the bridegroom leave his bride and the king his kingdom the huckster leave his booth and the reaper drop his hook that they might rescue Your Holy Sepulchre from pagan hands

And anything else? He'll ask

And I've seen a young man go out int the desert and over his head was a star

You may think you have failed child but remember that in the coming times your name and fame will awaken beauty and many's the traveler on the hard road will find his courage again and he thinking of Marco Polo And many's the young man will dream dreams and many's the old man will see visions and they reading the book by the gold candle light and many's the young girl will give you love and you dead for centuries But for this you must keep your dream

Now you'll think it's the queer pope I am to be telling you things like this instead of demanding converts But the wisdom that surpasses wisdom comes to you with the Anointing of the Oil I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago writes Saint Paul (whether in the body I cannot tell or

whether out of the body I cannot tell God knoweth)

How that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which is not lawful for a man to utter

Now you see there is a wisdom surpassing wisdom and it is out of this fount of wisdom I am drawing when I speak to you these words

Child I will not keep you any longer Only to say this and this is the chiefest thing never let your dream be taken from you Keep it unspotted from the world In darkness and in tribulation it will go with you as a friend but in wealth and power hold fast to it for then is danger Let not the mists of the world the gay diversions the little trifles draw you from glory

Remember!

Si oblitus fuero tui Jerusalem — If I forget thee O Jerusalem —

Oblivioni detur dextera mea —let my right hand forget her cunning—

Adhaereat lingua mea faucibus meis si non meminero tui — if I do not remember thee let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth—

Si non proposuero Jeru n prin

Georgia whose kings are born with the mark of an eagle on their right shoulder They passed through Persia where the magicians worship fire And they passed through the city of Saba where sleep the three magi who came to worship at Bethlehem and their names were Kaspar Balthasar and Melchior

And they passed through Camadi where great ruins are and robbers roam through the magical darkness And they passed northward of the Perilous Valley where the Devil s Head is in black stone and that is one of the nine entrances to hell and passed the Valley of the Cockadrills where there are serpents five fathoms in length and passed the Valley of Cruel Women who have precious stones in place of eyes

And they went through the Dismal Desert where no stream sang

And in the desert they passed the Trees of the Sun and Moon which speak with the voices of men And it was from the Speaking Tree that Alexander heard of his death And it was near there that he and Darius fought And they passed the *Arbre Sec* the Dry Tree which has a green bark on one side and white on the other and there are no trees within a

dred miles of that tree and it is sprung the staff of Adam

nd they passed through Balkh the Mother Cities And they passed through Taihan ere the great salt mountains are And they sed through Badashan where the moun hs of the rubies are And they passed ough Kashmir whose women are very autiful and whose magicians weave the ongest spells in the world

And moons were born and died

And they came to Alamoot the fortress of *enex de Monte* the Old Man of the Moun ain the King of the Assassins the greatest izard of all time

Now this is the tale of the Old Man of the Mountain

Whenever within his dominions there was fine young horseman the Old Man would put a spell on him and draw him to the Castle of Alamoot and outside of the castle sleep would come on him And when he woke up he would be inside the castle in the wonder ful gardens And they d tell him he was dead and in paradise And paradise it would be for him what with the lovely women and the great playing on the flutes the birds singing and the sun shining the crystal rivers and

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IX

AND SO THEY WENT ON EASTWARD EVER EAST ward and the moons were born grew waned and died

They passed through Khotan where the divers bring up jade from the rivers white jade and black jade and green jade veined with gold They passed through Camul the shameful city whose women are fair and wanton whose men are cuckolds And they passed through the province of Chitingolos where are the mountains of the Salamanders They passed through the city of Campichu where there are more idols than men And they passed through the great city of Samarkand where the Green Stone is on which Timur's throne was set And moons were born and died

They passed through Tangut where the men will not carry the dead out through the door of a house but must break a hole in the wall And they passed through Kialchta where there are snow white camels And they passed through the lands of Prester John

And now they were in the Tatar lands

There passed them lowing musk oxen There passed them the wild asses of Mongolia There passed them the barbarians with their great tents on wheels There passed them the black jowled savage idolaters There passed them the pretty white faced women There passed them huge abominable dogs

And they came to the town of Lob and a new moon arose and they entered the Desert of the Singing Sands

X

WHEREVER THEY WENT NOW WAS SAND AND A dull haze that made the sun look like a copper coin And a great silence fell on the caravan and nothing was heard but the crunch of the camels pads and the tinkle of the camels bells And no green thing was seen

And a great terror fell on the caravan so that one night a third of the caravan deserted The rest went on in silence under the dull sun And now they came across a village of white skeletons grinning in the silent sand And at night there was nothing heard not even the barking of a dog And others of the

terror saying Were we ever any place where green was where birds sang or there was sweet water? Or maybe we are dead Or maybe this was all our life and the pleasant towns and the lamplight in the villages and the apricots in the garden and our wives and children maybe they were all a dream that we woke in the middle of Let us lie down and sleep that we may dream again

But Marco Polo would not let them lie down for to lie down was death But he drove them onward And again they complained Surely God never saw this place that He left it so terrible Surely He was never here He was never here

And now that their minds were pitched to the height of madness the warlocks of the desert took shape and jeered at them and the white sheeted ghosts flitted alongside of them and the goblins of the Gobi harried them from behind And the sun was like dull copper through the haze and the moon like a guttering candle and stars there were none

And when the moon was at its full they came to the Hill of the Bell And through the night the Bell went *gongh gongh gongh* until they could feel it in every fiber of their bodies and their skin itched with it The

would stop their ears But they would hear it in the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet *Gongh gongh gongh*

And when they left the Hill of the Bell there were only six of the caravan left and a multitude of white sheeted ghosts And the caravan plodded onward dully And now the warlocks of the desert played another cruelty Afar off they would put a seeming of a lake and the travelers would press on gladly crying There is water! water! God lives! God lives! But there was only sand And now it would be a green vision and they would cry We have come to the edge of the desert After the long night dawn God lives! God lives! But there would be only sand sand And now it would be a city of shining domes in the distance And they would nudge one another and croak There are men there brother secure streets and merchants in their booths people to talk with and water for our poor throats But there would be only sand sand sand And they would cry like children God is dead! Haven t you heard Don t you know God is dead in His heaven and the warlocks are loosed on the land!

And on the last day of the moon they were

all but in sight of the desert's edge though they didn't know. And the goblins and the warlocks took counsel, for they were now afraid Marco and his few people would escape. They gathered together and they read the runes of the Flowing Sand.

And suddenly the camels rushed screaming into the desert with sudden panic, and a burning wind came, and the sands rose, and the desert heeled like a ship, and the day became night.

And young Marco Polo could stand no more. That was the end, the end of him, the end of the world, the end of everything. There was red darkness everywhere, and he could see nobody. O my Lord Jesus! he cried. O little Golden Bells! The wind boomed like an organ. The sand screamed. O my Lord Jesus! O little Golden Bells! And the voices of his father and uncle were like the [illegible] ing of birds. Where's the lad? [illegible] Where's our lad? Mark, Mark, [illegible] you got to? Lad of our heart, wher[illegible] But they couldn't find each other. [illegible] buffeted them like shuttlecocks [illegible] The sands snarled like a dog; the [illegible] mered like drums. Oh Gol[illegible]

little Golden Bells! O my Lord Jesus must it end here?

And the fight went out of him and a big sob broke in him and he lay down to die

I shall now tell you of golden bells
and her in the Chinese Garden

XII

I WOULD HAVE YOU NOW SEE HER AS I SEE HER standing before Li Po the great poet in her green costume And Li Po big fat with sad eyes and a twisted mouth uncomfortable as be damned The sun shone in the garden the butterflies the red and black and golden butterflies flitted from blossom to blossom And the bees droned And on the banks of the green lake the kingfisher tunneled his wee house and the wind shook the blossoms of the apple trees And Li Po sat on the marble slab and was very uncomfortable And in a dark bower was Sanang the magician brooding like an owl And Golden Bells stood before Li Po and there were hurt tears in her eyes

Did my father or I ever do anything to you Li Po that you should make a song such as they sing in the market place

What song

The Song of the Cockatoo

I don t remember

I ll remind you Li Po There alighted on the balcony of the King of Annam the song

And I go down to the drinking booths, and the passion of drinking comes on me—a fury against myself and a fury against the world. And the folk do be following me to see will I let drop one gem of verse that they can tell their grandchildren they heard from the lips of Li Po. And when my heart is high with the drinking I take a lute from a traveling poet, and not knowing what I'm saying I compose the song 'Out of fallow sorrow bloom the little songs.' You mustn't be hard on an old man, wee Golden Bells, and he thinking long for his dead friends."

"Ah, poor Li Po," she said, and she had grown all soft again. "Is it so terrible to be old?"

"Now you ask me a question, Golden Bells, and I'll give you an answer. Besides, it's part of my duties to teach you wisdom. No, it is not a terrible thing at all, at all, to be old. I see the young folk start out in life, and before them there's the showers of April, there's wind and heat and thunder and lightning. But I'm in warm brown October, and all of it's gone by me. And in a little while I'll sleep, and 'tis I need it, God help me! The old don't sleep much, wee Golden Bells, so 'tis a comfort to look forward to one's rest after the

XIII

AND NOW WHEN MARCO POLO WAS RESTED AND had recovered they brought him from the Convent of the Red Monks to where the Khan was in the city of Chandu Now there were two palaces in Chandu there was the winter palace which was of marble and the summer palace which was of gilt cane Around these palaces there was built a wall sixteen miles in compass and inside of it was a park of fountains and rivers and brooks with the speckled trout in them and meadows with the lark at her ease in the grass and trees of all varieties where the little birds do be building and none to grudge them a home And all the wild animals were abundant the timid hare and the wild deer and the wee croaking frogs long legged colts by their white mothers and little dogs tumbling over themselves with the sport of spring Brown bees among the clover strawberries in profusion trees would delight your eyes and brown cows and black cows and dappled moilies under the great leaves of them and lambs would be snowy of fleece All the flowers of the world were there the para

dise of wild things it was the park of Kubla Khan

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan quoted young Randall
A stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense bearing tree
And here were forests ancient as the hills
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery

Whose poem is that poem Brian Oge?

It is a poem of Coleridge s Malachi

I thought it was maybe a poem of Colquitto Dall McCracken of Skye that one of you lads had put English on It is a poem of the head you ken and Colquitto being a dark man could only see with the eye s ghost But it hasn t the warmth the life of the work of Blind Colquitto Brian Oge do you mind the poem Angus More Campbell of Rathlin wrote to Colquitto Dall?

Is aoibhinn duid Colquitto Dall I remembered It is happy for thee blind Colquitto who dost not see much of women If thou wert to see what we see thou wouldst

be tormented even as I am My sorrow O God that I was not stricken blind before I saw her amber twisted hair!

That s it that s it Brian Oge But this is not the place to be talking of poetry There is no poetry in this story

I will now tell you of Marco Polo and him entering the presence of the Great Khan

XIV

AND MARCO POLO WAS BROUGHT INTO THE presence And among all assembled there you could hear a pin drop

At the north end of the great hall sat the Khan himself and Marco Polo nearly dropped with surprise for where he expected a great magnificent figure of a man with majesty shining from his eyes he saw only a pleasant bearded man not quarter so well dressed as the meanest servant on the room and a fine welcoming smile in his face H throne was elevated so that his feet were on the level of the heads of the kinsmen of the Blood Royal beneath him and they in silk and ermine and fine brocades and jewels And beneath these were the barons and dukes and knights And beneath these were the captains of the fighting men three thousand and three And beneath these were the musicians and the sorcerers And behind Kubla Khan very big very erect stood his three great servants the Keeper of the Hunting Leopards the Keeper of the Speaking Drums and the Keeper of the Khan s Swords

And beside Kubla Khan on a little throne sat Golden Bells And it was the sight of her more than the sight of the great assembly that dumbed the words in his mouth And Kubla was smiling at him and she was smiling too

And Kubla saw there was something wrong with him that there was embarrassment on him and he rose from his throne

There is welcome for you here Marco Polo and no enmity There is interest in and eagerness for your message There is none here will criticize you or make it hard for you Let there be no shame on you in speaking before so many people Say what you have to say as if there were nobody here if that will help you barring myself and the little daughter beside me

O Emperor the words came back u[illegible] Marco Polo and ye great princes dukes and marquises counts knights and burgesses and people of all degrees who dwell in the light of the world grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ!

The message I have to give you I [illegible] give in the words of Him [illegible] message it is

Beati pauperes spiritu—Blessed are the poor in spirit

Quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum —for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Beati mites—Blessed are the meek

And Marco Polo went on and quoted for them the words that were spoken on the Mount in Galilee And they listened to him with great civility and attention And little Golden Bells leaned forward with her chin on her hands and Kubla leaned back in his throne with his eyes half closed

But I say unto you that ye resist not evil but whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also And at this the Great Khan looked up puzzled and a movement went through the fighting men in the hall But wee Golden Bells never budged a minute and Marco Polo went on

Et factum est cum consummasset Jesus verba haec—And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings the people were astonished at his doctrine

I shall now tell you of the life and death of the Lord Jesus

He told them of the birth in Bethlehem and of the teaching on the hills and the poets nodded their heads and he told them of the

cleansing of the lepers and of the casting out of devils and the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the magicians wondered and he told them of the betrayal by Judas with a kiss and the captains at arms shuffled in their seats and he told them of the scourging and of the crowning with thorns and the Great Khan snicked his dagger in and out of the sheath And a mist of tears came into the eyes of Golden Bells

And he told them of the crucifixion between two thieves and a great oath ripped from the beard of Kubla Khan and the silver tears ran from the eyes of Golden Bells

And on the third day He arose from the dead

And a great shout came from the throat of Kubla Khan and he stood up

He arose from among the dead men I ll warrant He showed himself to the Roman Pilate in all His power and majesty—

No said Marco Polo

Then He showed himself to the thousands who had seen him die upon the gallows tree!

No said Marco Polo

Who saw Him then?

His twelve Apostles and they in a little room!

And Kubla Khan sat down suddenly and said no more. There was a moment's murmur of wonder among the assembly and then silence. And Marco's heart fell. And he was aware of two things: of the great politeness of the Chinese people and of Golden Bell's pitying eyes.

XV

WHEN KUBLA KHAN DISMISSED THE ASSEMBLY and he took Marco Polo into a sitting room and Golden Bells came with them

And what did you think sir of what I said? And can you not see sir the truth that s in me?

Well now laddie said the Great Khan when we come to examine this sermon you quoted to us what is there in it but the rule of the righteous man? We ve had a great thinker and pious man of our own Con fucius I m not a reading man says he but I ve got an idea says he that there isn t a thing you said but is embraced in the Ana lects And if it isn t it ll be in the teachings of the Lord Buddha

Ah but sir Marco Polo said you ll have to admit that He of whom I speak was the true God made man

Now laddie remember I m an old man set in my head and my ways and I ve been used to one belief so long it would be l changing So don t press me now don t me I ask you

going further Sure you d be up against the sorcerers of the world They d ask you for a sign and you d have no sign and they d have signs in abundance I wouldn t think of letting you go against them Fair play s a jewel and you wouldn t have a chance There s the Red Pope from Tibet and there s the Black Magician from Korea and a hundred minor ones and the Warlock of the North from the Islands of Ice who governs the hail and the snow Child I wouldn t let you get into the same ring with them They d ruin you

But sir wasn t it a great miracle of the Lord s my rescue in the Gobi Desert?

A miracle of the Lord s! A miracle of Golden Bells here It was her magician saw you and she had the message put on the drums and the desert patrols went to seek you It was herself here wee Golden Bells

And Golden Bells mouth gave a smile of shame that his thought should be broken in his mind

A long way I m after coming said Marco Polo and when I set out my heart was high

Now don t be taking it too hard says the Khan kindly Sure there s a power of good you can be doing here Maybe you can do something with Li Po says he I d like fine

for you to try The man is worrying the life out of me with his drinking I never know when he goes out whether he ll come back all right or feet foremost on a door For he s got the bitter tongue when the drink s in him and China could ill afford to lose him And there are some of my captains and the tune they re always piping is War! War! War! And let s show up this Alexander who said he conquered the world And I m past the age when you make war for devilment So let you be helping me out with them Marco Polo

But Marco Polo knew this was only meant in kindness and his heart was broken

Ah wee lady —he turned to Golden Bells — wee lady wee lady why didn t you let me die in the desert? Why didn t I die?

And why should you die Marco Polo? Her low sweet voice rang in the heart of him Didn t you come here to give your message? And to make converts? And didn t I hear your message? And am not I your convert Marco Polo?

XVI

AND NOW THE PLACE OF LI I O WAS USURPED and gone *Sanang* with his magic glass and in the jasmine garden by the Lake of Cranes Marco Polo sat and instructed Golden Bells

XVII

AND HE TOLD OF THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT when savage Herod reigned and of the Jewish maid and her child sleeping beneath the shadow of the great Sphinx while the shades of the old Afric gods looked on in reverence, Amenalk and Thoth and the moon horned Io Isis and Osiris And the painted kings knelt in their pyramids and out of the sluggish Nile came the strange aquatic population the torpid crocodiles and monstrous *water lizards and the great hippopotami lumbered to bow before the little Lord of all things*

And he told her how Satan had tempted Him on the lonely black craigs

But you are not listening little Golden Bells—

Indeed I am listening Marco Polo Yes indeed I am I love to hear your voice Marco Polo You are so earnest Marco Polo there is such a light in your eyes Listen Marco Polo Li Po *once* wrote a poem White Gleam the Gulls and it is the poem by which he is best known and every time I hear it there is

an echo in my heart But Marco Polo I never listened to Li Po s song so eagerly as I am listening to your voice

But you are not taking it in little Golden Bells

It is very hard to take in Marco Polo It happened so long ago It is hard to think of a tragedy in a strange country and we in this garden on the second moon of spring And it was so very long ago Do you hear the bees Marco Polo—the bees among the almond blossoms? And see the blue heron by the lotus flowers? And do you see the little tortoise Marco Polo and he sunning himself on a leaf? If I throw a pebble Marco Polo he will dive and he is such a clumsy diver Marco Polo!

But you must listen Golden Bells and believe me

I do believe Marco Polo I honestly do Don t you know I believe you? Anything you say Marco Polo I believe You wouldn t be coming all the way over the world to be telling me a lie Of course I believe

And doesn t it make you happy Golden Bells?

Once I was unhappy Marco Polo I used to sit here and on my lute I used to play the Song of the Willow Branches which is the

saddest song in the world Under the moon I used to be lonely and the droning of the bees meant nothing to me and now it is a sweet brave song I cannot play Willow Branches any more so alien is sadness to me And the moon smiles I am very happy Marco Polo

It is the True Religion little Golden Bells that makes you happy

Is it Marco Polo? Is it? It must be I suppose I don t know what it is but I am very happy

XVIII

AND HE TOLD HER OF PAUL WHO HAD SEEN A vision and gone preaching through the world who was persecuted who was shipwrecked who was bitten by a viper and who survived everything that he might preach the Lord Jesus He was a fierce ragged man with burning eyes And he told her of Paul s instructions to women

You do not look at me when you speak Marco Polo Only your voice comes to me not your eyes Is it because of Paul?

And Marco Polo felt great trouble on him because he could not explain But Golden Bells went on

There is little in your faith about women Marco Polo Is it a faith only for men then? Is it against women? Must the young men not look at the young women?

No Golden Bells the young men must not look too much on the young women

But that is very foolish Marco Polo Is it wrong to see the beauty of the almond blossoms wrong to taste the scented wind? Is it wrong to watch the kingfisher seeking his

nest Is it wrong to watch the moon the stars? All these are very beautiful Marco Polo so beautiful as to make me cry Is it wrong to watch them?

It is not wrong Golden Bells The glory of God is in the beauty of his handicraft

Li Po is old and wise and a great poet Marco Polo and Li Po says there is beauty in a running horse and beauty in a running stream but there is no beauty like the beauty of a young woman and she letting down her hair God made the beauty of women too Marco Polo as well as the beauty of the stars Won t you please explain to me Marco Polo Why should Li Po say one thing and Saint Paul another?

But Golden Bells Saint Paul is inspired of God

But Li Po is inspired of God too Marco Polo You mustn t be thinking little of Li Po He is fat and old and drunken but when he sings Marco Polo it is the song of the wandering stars But why must not the young men look at the young women Marco Polo? Why must they not look with their eyes?

It will be hard for me to tell you Golden Bells—

Look at me now Marco Polo I lift up

your eyes and look into my eyes Is there evil in me Marco Polo that your eyes should avoid me as the fox avoids the dog? Or maybe I am not beautiful Maybe they told me wrong because I was a king s daughter and they would not have me think little of myself Maybe I am not beautiful Marco Polo may be I hurt your eyes—

Ah Golden Bells the little horned moon is not more beautiful

Then why must not the young men look at the young women Marco Polo? You are here to instruct me Won t you tell me why?

Maybe—maybe—maybe it is for fear of sin Golden Bells

Sin? Sin! Why should there be sin? I know sin Marco Polo They have warned me against it since I crept upon the floor There are two sins There is meanness Marco Polo and there is cruelty and those are the only sins I know your heart Marco Polo there is no meanness there You would not have come here were you mean The mean do not travel afar for other people And cruelty! Surely you would not be cruel to me Marco Polo You would not be cruel to anybody dear Marco Polo You would not be cruel to me?

Cruel to you little Golden Bells! How could I be cruel to you?

But the sin Marco Polo?

I don't know Golden Bells I don't know

XIX

AND ONE DUSK THE MOON ROSE OVER THE Chinese garden and Marco Polo finished telling her of what John saw on Patmos and he an old man

Veni Domine Jesu

Gratia Domini nostri Jesu Christi cum omnibus vobis Amen!

It is very difficult Marco Polo I don t quite understand

I don t quite understand myself Golden Bells But that is all I can tell you But you will understand more he said My mission is finished now and I will go back I will stop at the court of Prester John and he will send a bishop surely or some great cardinal to baptize you and to teach you the rest

You will go back? A great pain stabbed her I never thought somehow of you as going back

I have come on a mission Golden Bells and I must go back

There is a woman maybe in Venice—And she turned her head away from him and from the moon

I would not have you thinking t Colden Bells There is none in Venice duty from me And if the queen of the wo were there and she pledged to me I never look at her and I after knowing Colden Bells!

Is it money Marco Polo? she whispe in the dusk It is maybe your uncle and father are pressing you to return Let you worry then for my father the Creat Khan settle with them too There is not a hor all Lartary that your uncle cannot have a woman either And your father can h the jewels of the treasury and all the sw too even the sword with which my father quered China My father will give him tl I ask Only let you not be leaving this n lit garden

Dear Colden Bells it isn t that bi came here for converts—

Oh Marco Polo listen! There is a fe Kai fung fu and they are an evil folk an cowardly folk and my father abhors the shall ask my father to send captains of and fighting men to convert them to y faith Marco Polo or lop off their heads we can send a few hundreds to the Pope Rome and he will never know how they

converted and he will be satisfied Only let you not be going away from me in my moon lit garden You will only be turning to trade Marco Polo and marrying a woman Let you stay here in the moonlit garden!

Ah little Golden Bells there is no place in the world like your moonlit garden There is no place I d be liefer than in the moonlit garden But little Golden Bells I set out in life to preach the Lord Jesus crucified It was for that I came to China

Let you not be fooling yourself young Marco Polo Let you not always be ascribing to God the things that are mine You did not come to preach to China you came to see me and your mind stirred up with the story the sea captain told of me playing Willow Branches by the Lake of Cranes O Marco Polo before you came there were the moon and the sun and the stars and I was lonely O Marco Polo she cried you wouldn t go you couldn t go! What would you be doing in cold Venice far from the warm moonlit garden

Sure I ll be lonely too little Golden Bells a white monk in a monastery praying for you

But I don t want to be prayed for Marco

Polo She stamped her foot I want to be loved And there you have it out of me and a great shame to you that you made me say it me that was desired of many and would have no man until you came And surely it is the harsh God you have made out of The Kindly Person you spoke of And tis not He would have my heart broken and you turning yourself into a crabbed monk And how do you know your preaching will convert any? Tis few you converted here Ah I'm sorry dear Marco Polo I shouldn't have said it but there is despair on me and I afraid of losing you

Tis true though I have nothing nobody to show

You have me Am not I converted? Am not I a Christian Marco Polo let me tell you something I said to my father I wanted to marry you and I asked him if he would give you a province to govern and he said Sure and welcome And I asked him for Yangchau the pleasantest city in all China And he said Sure and welcome Golden Bells And I told him we would be married and go there and govern his people kindly And you wouldn't shame me before my own father and all the people of China You couldn't do that Marco

Polo Marco Polo —she came toward him her eyes shining — let you stay!

Christ protect me! Christ guide me! Christ before me!

Marco Polo!

Christ behind me!

The moon Marco Polo and me Golden Bells and the nightingale in the apple tree!

Christ on my right hand! Christ on my left! Christ below me!

Her arms were around his neck her cheek came close to his

Marco Polo! Marco Polo!

Christ above me!

My Marco Polo!

O God! Golden Bells!

And he put his arms around her and his cheeks to hers and all the battle and the disappointment and the fear and the strangeness went out of him And down by the lake the wee frogs chirruped and in the apple tree the nightingale never ceased from singing And they stayed there shoulder to shoulder and cheek to cheek And the moon rose higher And it seemed only a moment they were there until they heard the voice of Li Lo in the garden

Are you th

finest of women but a pleasant thing like a long putt sunk or the first salmon of the year caught like a trout or the ball through the goal before the whistle blows? And there's many a well filled belly over a hungry soul

But a story is how destiny is interwoven the fine and gallant and the tragic points of life And you mustn t look at them with the eyes of the body but you must feel with the antennæ of your being Now if you were to look at the Lord Jesus with physical eyes what would it be but a kindly crazy man and He coming to a hard and bitter end? Look at it simply and what was the story of Troy but a dirty row over a woman?

But often times the stories with the endings that grocer s daughters do not be liking are the stories that are worth while And the worth while stories do be lasting Never clip a story half ways because the Widow Robinson doesn t like to have her mind disturbed and she warming her breadth at the fire The Widow Robinson may have a white coin to buy a book with and think you re the grand author entirely and you pleasing her But the Lord God who gave you the stories will know you for a louse

I call to your mind the stories of the great

English writer—the plays of the Prince of Denmark and the poor blind king on the cliff and the Scottish chieftain and his terrible wife The Widow Robinson will not like those stories and she will be keeping her white coin But those stories will endure forever

I will now tell you of Marco Polo and him leaving China

YOU MUST SEE HIM NOW AS HE WAS SEVENTEEN years after he had come to China and fourteen years after his wife, little Golden Bells, had died, a lean figure of a man with his hair streaked with gray, a lean hard face on him and savage eyes, and all the body of him steel and whalebone from riding on the Great Khan's business, and riding fast and furious so that he might sleep and forget, but forgetting never came to him. You might think he was a harsh man from his face and eyes, but he was the straight man in administering justice, and he had the soft heart for the poor—the heart of Golden Bells. He was easily moved to anger, but the fine Chinese people never minded him, knowing he was a suffering man. Though never a word of Golden Bells came from his mouth, barring maybe that line of Dante's, the saddest line in the world, and that he used to repeat to himself and no one there:

la bella persona
Che mi fu tolta ... che mi fu tolta ... who was taken from me. Taken! Taken from me!

And sometimes a look would come over his face as if he were listening for a voice to speak —listening listening and then a wee harsh laugh would come from him very heartbreaking to hear and whatever was in his hand papers or a riding whip he would pitch down and walk away

He had just come in from the borders of the Arctic lands from giving the Khan s orders to the squat hairy tribes who live by the icy shores and had come to the garden by the Lake of Cranes the garden where the Golden Bells of singing and laughter were dumb this armful of years and he was alone and the listening look was on his face when there came Kubla and Li Po and the old magician

Now Kubla was very old so old he could hardly walk and very frail and Li Po was very old too and gray in the face and sadder in the eyes than ever and the magician s white beard had grown to his knees but there was no more humor in his eyes And Marco Polo helped the old Khan to sit down

Oh sir why did you come to me? Sure I was going to you the moment I had changed my riding clothes Sir you should have stayed in your bed

There was something on my mind Marco

and the old do be thinking long to get t
off their mind

What can I do sir?

Marco my child you mustn t take v
I say amiss But I want you to be going back
to be going back to Venice

Sir what have I done to dissatisfy you? I
all my embassies have I been weak to th
strong or bullying toward the weak? Does
oppressed man complain of injustice does
merchant complain of being cheated or
woman say she was wronged?

Now Marco of my heart didn t I say no
to be taking it amiss? Is there any one el
to me nor you or is it likely I d be listen
to stories brought against you? It s just this
I m an old and tired man Marco Beag and
in a week or a moon at most I m due to die so
the *Sanang* tells me Don t be sorry son Be
glad for me Life has been a wee bit too long

And now son dear I want to tell you
You ve been closer to me than my own sons
and you ve been the dear lad And there s not
one man in all China can say you did a harsh
or an unjust thing but my dear son tis just
the way of people there s a power of hard feel
ing against you in this land you being a
stranger and having stood so high

So when I m dead dear son there s many would do you an injury and treat you badly aye in our family itself though they smile on you now Let you be going now Marco I ll miss you to close my eyes for me but my heart will be lighter It will so I couldn t sleep easy and you ill treated in this land of mine You ask him too Li Po

Ah sir Marco laughed — and Li Po what is ill treatment to me? Sorrow s my blood brother What I ve suffered! Do you think I could suffer more?

I know Marco I know

Don t you think I suffer now sir? Fourteen years she s dead now the wee one who lay by my side in sleep And never a word and never a sign In the house where we were married I can see the pool and the willows and the hibiscus but there is never a token of her he broke out The leaves of trees cover the pavilion the hair of the musicians is silver and dust is on the blue and white tiles And she never comes to comfort me I can t sleep with waiting The stars never seem to wane and the hoar frost comes on the grass and I m always waiting Christ! why should I go back? I ve forgotten Venice I ve even forgotten my God for her!

sign from Golden Bells will you leave China?

If there is a sign from her I'll leave China" said Marco Polo

And it was dusk in the Garden by the Lake of Cranes

XXII

THE SANANG CAME OVER TO MARCO POLO

Give me the black tress that s over your heart

And Marco Polo undid his coat and his undercoat and his fine sark and took out the perfumed hair and gave it to the *Sanang*

Let you sing a little song Li Po the magician said the way she ll be hearing and come I have part of her here and let you put in the garden the atmosphere she loved And Li Po took his lute and plucked gently at the strings

The swish of your silken skirt is discontinued

he sang

And the grass grows through the broken hearthstone
And your room that was so warm and swept is cold and mouldy
But he the beloved of your heart clings on
A fallen leaf in the chink of a door
In the chink of a closed door!

And it was dusk in the garden and the voice of Li Po broke and his lute stilled and

The old Emperor breathed his aged gentle breathing and the *Sanang* said his secret terrible formula and Marco Polo was tense as a hunting dog

And suddenly at the end of the garden in the perfumed Asian dusk there was a beam like moonlight and into the soft ray of it trod little Colden Bells with her wee warm face and her wee warm hands and her hair dark as a cloud and her eyes pleading pleading

Go now Marco Polo please go! Her lips made the words but no sound came to him

Oh Colden Bells Golden Bells! he rushed forward but the moonlight of no moon faded and there was nothing and he *dropped on his knees sobbing in the dusk by* the Lake of Cranes

XXIII

AND AFTER A WHILE HE GOT UP FROM HIS knees and set his teeth on his sobbing and threw his head back and squared his shoulders and notched his belt and faced the three ancient men

Well he said that s that

He went over and knelt and kissed the Khan s hand

You ll be seeing her soon sir you ll be telling her everything

Yes son I ll tell her

Then he patted the *Sanang* on the shoulder and Thanks! said he simply and he took Li Po s hand in both his and they looked at each other for a moment and no words came to either

Well he says at length I ll be hitting the road then I ll not say good by to any of you I ll be seeing you all pretty soon again There s a war on between Venice and the Genoese and where that s hottest you ll find me and the quicker my end the better I ll be pleased But it would be like my luck he said bitterly not to be killed but to be taken pr

fer and to end my life in some lousy jail Oh well we ll hope for the best He laughed So—so long!

And the four of them looked at one an other trying to smile and great grief on them

China will miss you my son said old Kubla

It s nothing to how I ll be missing China said Marco Polo Venice! It s only a sound to me I ll be an exile in the city of my birth But what s the use of complaining? If it s go it s go But it ll be funny said he My body will be there but my heart and mind will be in China There ll be a gray eye always turn ing to China and it will never see China Queer! All the voices and all the instru ments in Saint Mark s and in my ears the little drums of China All the sunlight will be glinting on the Grand Canal but the little rain of China—the little rain of China will be falling in my heart

Ah well if it s go it s go I d better be hitting the road So I ll say good by for the present and

Oh my God Almighty!

THE END

OF

MESSER MARCO POLO

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SOME RECENT PENGUINS

[illegible]CEN *by James Branch Cabell*

[illegible]te is a tale of Poictesme of Jurgen who was a mon[illegible]ous clever fellow and yet willing, nevertheless to [illegible]te of any drink once—of a middle aged pawnbroker [illegible]o regains for a period his lost youth and courts a [illegible]riety of the world's fairest women—from Helen to [illegible]s Satan herself Where demanded H L Menck[illegible], is there another book so beautifully contrived so [illegible]nly a masterpiece? It will I believe, long outlast [illegible] day

[illegible]ORTILLA FLAT *by John Steinbeck*

One of the modern American classics, a latter day *Don [illegible]ixote* this delightful tale of the [illegible] of Southern [illegible]alifornia is replete with wisdom [illegible]s and au[illegible]hentic belly laughs To have so presented them, said William Rose Benet and made their [illegible] almost hys[illegible]erically funny is no slight achievement

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER by [illegible]

[illegible] No recent first novel [illegible] struck the [illegible] Without any lustiness with a hard [illegible] [illegible]ullers presents poor people in [illegible] [illegible] of people Dostoevsk[illegible] might have [illegible] quite differently One wonders [illegible] [illegible]ould have known so much about [illegible] women and children too —[illegible]

ok is a strange mating of Rabelais and the
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al realism by the author of *Tobacco Road*

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an account of the education of a writer (of the dis
and training that went into such eminently re
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pence*)—it recalls in it it urbanity and worldly w
the great prose writers of the Eighteenth Century
longs to the tradition of Rousseau Montaigne Ne
and Henry Adams

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The tory of a Wild Goose chase—through three
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biography that starts with its hero in Elizabethan
and finishes up with a hero ne in 19 8 is also a h
ingly evocative picture of English history

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lution provides one of the most convincing portrai
George Wash ngton in fiction Carl Van Doren wi
reading *The Unvanquished* is the next best thin
having been on the scene at the time

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Ernest Boyd combines to make a picture of Amer
life which carries the inescapable conviction of re

In their unpremeditated art they have a powe

suggestion and revelation which we are accustomed to find in the great Russ ans

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This novel presents a cross se t on of New York up to and including the h p fla k era It is a literal sl e of ife knifing through the fac des of kyscraper and brown one house to reveal the New Yorker n all his permut ons

READ AND WINE *by Ig azio S lo*

lone s great no el of the Italian underground just be ore the Ethiop an war As Edmund Wilson says in the *w Yorker* t has someth ng in common with the nor ma novels l ke *Dead Souls* and *Huckleber y*